

Notes on Planning SPC Meeting on 18th December 2023 (a hybrid meeting)

Present:

Cllr Michael J. Crowe (Chair - deputising for Cllr Peter Keane), Cllr Niall McNelis

Derrick Hambleton (GCCN), Brendan Mulligan (GCCN)

Online:

Cllr Frank Fahy, Cllr Clodagh Higgins, Cllr Imelda Byrne

In attendance:

Uinsinn Finn, Acting Director of Services – Infrastructure Development & Planning, Eoghan Lynch, Senior Planner (Urbanism & Future Planning), James Russell, Senior Planner (Development Management & Enforcement), Helen Coleman, Senior Executive Planner, June Joyce, Sandra Higgins

Online:

Peter Staunton, Senior Executive Planner

Apologies:

Cllr Peter Keane

The meeting commenced at 9:00am

1. Minutes of Meeting of 5th September 2023

Adoption of the minutes was proposed by Cllr Frank Fahy and seconded by Cllr Clodagh Higgins.

2. Greater Galway Charter

A copy of 'The Greater Galway Charter for Sustainable Urbanism, October 2023', was circulated with the notice of the meeting on the 8th December.

Eoghan Lynch, Senior Planner described it as a set of values and aspirations - a vision of how the city could, and perhaps should, develop. It can be an aid to decision making. It is a non-statutory document.

It consists of 4 principles and 12 propositions. It has grown out of an initiative of the Irish Cities group of architects. It was presented at an Architecture at the Edge workshop in October 2022.

The Greater Galway Forum, a group of Chief Executives from across the city, was also involved.

The Academy of Urbanism and Architecture at the Edge were asked to organise a conference in April 2023.

The Charter Steering Committee includes members of the Academy of Urbanism, Emmet Humphreys Senior Executive Architect, Galway City Council and representatives from The Greater Galway Forum.

There are Global Challenges, such as Climate Change, National Challenges, such as Housing, that have local impacts that have to be addressed and local challenges, such as Transport, that we need to address.

Eoghan Lynch referred to the objective in the NPF [National Objective 3b] that requires that at least 50% of all new homes targeted for the city and suburbs by 2040 must be accommodated within the existing built-up city footprint. There will be difficult decisions to be made in relation to placemaking, active travel, public realm improvements and new housing. The Charter provides a vision and direction we can refer to. It is apart from the statutory City Development Plan.

The next step for the Charter is the implementation stage. It will be necessary to engage with neighbourhoods and communities. Galway City Council will look at options for sustainable development of neighbourhoods.

It is proposed to hold another conference on the Charter on the 28th and 29th May 2024.

At this point the matter was opened up for discussion.

Derrick Hambleton highlighted the lack of community involvement to date. This SPC comprises Councillors, Business Sector and Trade Union representatives and Community representatives (GCCN). The only mention of “community” in the Charter is in Proposition 8. GCCN has 140 community groups as members but there is no mention of GCCN in the Charter.

Cllr Imelda Byrne expressed her agreement in principle with the Charter. She enquired as to the timeline and whether it only covers the life of the City Development Plan and how will the impacts be measured? She also asked if it was proposed to hold a conference annually.

B. Mulligan supported what Derrick Hambleton had said and observed that there is no mention in the Charter of the SDGs.

Eugene Lynch responded that there had been a workshop in October 2022 which had included a broad engagement. They don't want to engage too early for fear of creating expectations. It is difficult to engage on these abstract matters. The Universities have shown an interest in becoming engaged in this.

It is a 50-year vision and is intended to be a conversation. It is more of an idea rather than being the property of one singular organisation/work programme. They aspire to engage the community.

Derrick Hambleton observed that it cost €140 to attend the Conference in April – the GCCN Representatives had attended at their own cost. Such costs are prohibitive if the community is to be fully engaged.

Eoghan Lynch responded that the Conference last April was an exclusive, academic event.

B. Mulligan said that early engagement with the community is necessary to tap into the wisdom in the community.

Cllr Niall McNelis regretted that the stand-out soundbite from the Conference in April was the “broken teeth” analogy. He agreed that GCCN have a talent pool that should be engaged with.

He observed that the Trade Unions and entire Business Community were not involved. He expressed the view that engagement with young people would be very important and he mentioned Comhairle na nÓg and Youth Reach.

Eoghan Lynch agreed there are learnings to be taken note of and no slight to GCCN was intended.

3. Ardaun LAP Update

An East Galway Transportation Study, an Area Based Transport Assessment (ABTA), is being prepared which will look at how Ardaun will relate to adjoining settlements. It is being funded by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and being led by Galway County Council – the consultant is Systra. It is looking at the Eastern Metropolitan Area which includes Ardaun. It will review the ABTA previously prepared for Ardaun [Review of Transport Access, November 2018].

The Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (GMATS) is taking centre stage so the ABTA can't be completed until the GMATS is done. Eoghan Lynch expects the GMATS to go on display in March/April 2024.

It is proposed to go to tender for an Urban Design Plan which will have transport objectives built into it. It will have to be consistent with the compact growth objective of the NPF.

The Draft Sustainable Housing and Compact Settlement Guidelines for Planning Authorities are due to go to Cabinet soon. They will have an impact on the Urban Design Framework and transport plans.

The Review [the First Revision] of the National Planning Framework is expected to go on display in Q1/Q2 of 2024. It will have impacts in terms of Transport Oriented Development (TOD).

The new LAP will take into account TOD and the new Sustainable Housing and Compact Settlement Guidelines.

The existing Ardaun LAP will expire in July 2024. The zoning of the Ardaun LAP Area is included in the City Development Plan. Developers are not knocking down the door about Ardaun. Why?

B. Mulligan observed that the lack of wastewater and water infrastructure is the reason why developers are not knocking down the door at Ardaun. Eoghan Lynch confirmed that Irish Water has as yet not submitted a new application for the proposed wastewater storage tank at Merlin Park PS.

Cllr Michael Crowe enquired if planning applications could be made for Ardaun given the lack of wastewater infrastructure and in advance of the proposed Urban Design Framework?

Helen Coleman responded that there are no obstacles to the submission of planning applications.

Eoghan Lynch said we need to look and see how we can kick off the servicing of Ardaun. Higher densities than those provided for under the existing Ardaun LAP would be allowed under the relevant SPPR [Specific Planning Policy Requirement].

Cllr Michael Crowe observed that it was hard to see how somebody could progress a planning application for Ardaun given present circumstances.

Helen Coleman said that considerable investment had been made in roads to facilitate Ardaun. A planning application would be assessed if one were submitted.

Cllr Michael Crowe noted that the involvement of two local authorities was not helpful. Helen Coleman responded that they had successfully got the road downgraded to a Regional Road to facilitate access to Ardaun. The City Council will look at a second exit onto the dual carriageway. Cllr

Michael Crowe asked how we could get access to the East Galway Transportation Study. Helen Coleman responded that the County Council is leading that study.

Derrick Hambleton expressed the view that any decision to grant permission for development at Ardaun, in current circumstances, appealed to An Bord Pleanála would be refused by An Bord Pleanála.

Uinsinn Finn noted that:

- the land at Ardaun is zoned for development.
- The statutory LAP has to be reviewed.
- The review will take into account the new guidelines previously referenced.
- Those guidelines will also inform developers.
- The City Council doesn't own the land at Ardaun.
- Irish Water is working on the services for the first phase of the development.
- Irish water will have the infrastructure in place before the first homes will be occupied.
- The two local authorities are working together on the GMATS.
- Another new junction to the east of the Kirwan Junction is being looked at to give access to lands to the east of Ardaun.

Uinsinn Finn said a presentation could be given to the next Planning SPC meeting.

4. Heritage Forum/Plan Update

Eoghan Lynch reported that there had been a meeting of the Heritage Forum last Friday, 15th December, at which there had been a robust discussion. The intention is to have a Draft Heritage Plan ready by the end of March. The Planning SPC will see the draft plan before it goes on public display.

Cllr Niall McNelis asked who the members of the Heritage Forum are and will the consultation be targeted at specific groups? He referred to the two canons outside City Hall and the weighbridge. He observed that many businesses want to put in solar panels but are being restricted.

Derrick Hambleton noted that there have been four meetings of the Forum to date and that there had been a change of emphasis at the fourth meeting. He said that we have one of the prime waterways in the country – the Eglington Canal. The lock gates have never been replaced. Cllr Fahy is on the record as saying that it would never reopen for navigation. There is funding available nationally from Waterways Ireland. He referred to the visionary 10-Year Plan published by Waterways Ireland last month [Reimagining Our Waterways]. There should be a medium/long term plan for projects like the Eglington Canal.

Eoghan Lynch said that the Heritage Plan is a City Council document that takes a shared stewardship approach. The current Heritage Plan has 75 actions. The new plan will have short/medium/long term goals. It will be a 5-year plan. It will not be a land-use plan.

There will be engagement with young people thorough the appropriate channels.

5. New Planning Department Structure

Eoghan Lynch explained that a new planning structure was now in place under the Director of Services – Infrastructure Development and Planning.

There is a Senior Executive Officer and two Senior Planners who are:

- Eoghan Lynch, Senior Planner, with responsibility for Forward Planning, Heritage & Conservation and for Urbanism & Placemaking.
- James Russell, Senior Planner, for Development Management and for Enforcement.

The City Council will be advertising for a Chief Technician in January 2024.

There is a new Project-Based Team for Urbanism and Placemaking:

- Senior Planner – Eoghan Lynch
- Senior Executive Engineer – Michael Lally
- Executive Engineer - ??????

The above team will advance projects such as the Public Realm improvement of Cross Street.

Cllr Niall Mc Nelis asked how do the planning resources in Galway City Council compare to those in other Local Authorities? Have we enough resources?

Eoghan Lynch responded that the new structure arises from the recommendations in the Office of the Planning Regulator's (OPR) Review. The City Council will be reporting on progress of implementation to the OPR. The Planning Section has grown by about 50% in **positions**. Recruitment to fill vacant positions is very difficult as it is difficult to recruit experienced planners. A new planner has been recruited for Forward Planning – Kevin Walsh.

A Conservation Officer remains to be recruited. There will be interviews for that position in January 2024.

Cllr Niall McNelis asked is there enough staff to handle both new applications and enforcement?

Uinsinn Finn responded that a good many additional staff have been approved.

6. AoB

Uinsinn Finn advised that it is proposed to hold a Joint Meeting of City and County Planning SPCs on the afternoon of the 23rd January 2024. Representatives of the Northern & Western Regional Authority (NWRA) will be in attendance.

Uinsinn Finn said that consideration will be given to holding the next Planning SPC on the same date as the Joint Meeting of City and County SPCs.

Dates for Planning SPC meetings in 2024 will be circulated early in the New Year.

The following items will be on the Agenda for the next Planning SPC meeting:

- Draft Galway City Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
- Local Transport Plan for Ardaun
- Small Area Population Statistics (SAPs) from Census 2022

The meeting finished at 10:00am

Brendan Mulligan, A GCCN Representative on the Planning SPC